

'Concept lounge' brings taste of tribal fantasy to the masses

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What was a landmass that existed hundreds of millions of years ago may now be mistaken for Austin's newest nightlife destination. Michael Ault, Steven Seymour, Omar Wolff and Ken Howery have come together to bring ultra-lounge Pangaea and a taste of African tribal fantasy to the downtown area.

Pangaea is a concept lounge that offers a mixture of bottle and table service, while still maintaining the feel of a bar and nightclub. A large, theatrical curtain separates the front of the club from the more private back bar. Free floating tables are scattered throughout the venue, and long benches with upholstered seats, named "banquettes," line the walls. Each table or banquette essentially becomes its own lounge area and personal party. Each private lounge area will have its own waitress to cater table service.

"You don't have to wait through bars, try to get the bartender's attention, remember everybody's drink and try to bring them back," Ault said.

There is a one-bottle minimum per table, with prices ranging from \$150 to \$5,000 for champagne. Regular drinks prepared by bartenders range from \$7 to \$12.

Pangaea is also a live music venue, already fully booked every night of Austin's South by Southwest Music Festival in March. The banquettes can be quickly removed, and there are risers that transform into a stage.

Inspired by Ault's multiple trips to South Africa throughout his life, Pangaea indulges in antique tribal decor to uphold its African safari theme.

"It is more about creating a fantasy and creating a place that sort of escapes and connecting with this primordial sense that you get when you go to a place like a safari in Africa," Wolff says.

With a reputation of glamour and the attraction of celebrities among its affluent customers, Pangaea's entrance into Austin reveals the continuing transformation of a city once branded by its laid-back atmosphere.

Architectural engineering senior Sam Covey notes the transformation in several ways.

"I think Austin is definitely losing its kind of old-timey, hippie-ish, small-town feel," Covey says. "A lot of people with money are seeing this as a good opportunity, and they're bringing their businesses in, and they're sort of changing all of the city."

Covey observes that commercialization is spreading through the university, and new boutiques and chain sandwich restaurants are appearing on the drag.

"You can tell there is complete commercialization of the Drag and even of the University. For instance, putting Starbucks and Seattle's Best all in and kicking out all the different, smaller food vendors," Covey said. "It's sad, in a way, but things can't always stay the same."

As far as new nightclubs, Pangaea will make a statement among Austin's nightlife. The nightclub boasts several successful locations spread throughout the country and world, including New York, southern Florida, London and Marbella, Spain.

"We thought it would be great to come to a city which really welcomes you with open arms," Wolff said.

The owners of Pangaea hope to attract a mixed demographic. Wolff describes his idea of an assortment of ages and sexualities.

"We'd like to be all-inclusive. We'd definitely like to get a mix of straight and gay, and men and women, and older and younger - just about anyone who's looking to have a wild time," he said. "If you're wearing flip flops or you're 70, it really shouldn't matter."

Cover charges for men will be employed depending on the night of the week. For table reservations, call 512-472-8882.

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